Asian American Panethnicity:
Challenges and Possibilities

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Introduction

In a 1999 article published in *Gidra*, an activist Asian American news magazine, Naomi Iwasaki (1999, under "Asian American or Not") writes, "You know, the hardest thing about pan-Asian solidarity is the 'pan' part. It forces us all to step outside of our comfort zones, whether they be constructed by ethnicity, class, home city, identity, whatever." Iwasaki's statement calls attention to the social constructedness of pan-ethnicity — panethnic identities are self-conscious products of political choice and actions, not of inherited phenotypes, bloodlines, or cultural traditions. Panethnic movements and organizations bring diverse cultural groups together in cooperation around shared political goals. In the United States, examples of panethnic groups include the Native American, the Latino, and the Asian American. Despite their distinct histories and separate identities, these groups have at times united to protect and advance their collective interests. Since numbers count in the American political structure, many racialized groups have determined that their civic engagement — that is, their efforts to promote social change through participation in the larger democratic process and/or through grassroots community organizing —is more effective when they organize panethnically (Cornell 1988; Espiritu1992; Saito 1998).

In my 1992 publication *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*, I identify the twin roots of Asian American panethnicity — in the racialization of Asian national groups by dominant groups and in Asian Americans' responses to those constructions. I argue that the racialist constructions of Asians as

homogeneous and interchangeable spawn important alliances and affiliations among ethnic and immigrant groups of Asian origin. Adopting the dominant group's categorization of them, Asian Americans have institutionalized pan-Asianism as their political instrument, thereby enlarging their own capacities to challenge and transform the existing structure of power. In other words, Asian Americans did not just adopt the pan-Asian concept but also transformed it to conform to their political, economic, and ideological needs.

In the four decades since the emergence of the pan-Asian concept in the late 1960s, Asian American communities have changed in dramatic ways. No longer constrained by race-based exclusion laws, Asian immigrants began arriving in much larger numbers than before. Many of the post-1965 immigrants have little direct experience with the Asian American movement and little reason to think of themselves as Asian American rather than as immigrants, as low-wage workers, or as members of different national and ethnic groups (Espiritu et al. 2000, 131). Moreover, recent immigration has further diversified Asian Americans along cultural, generational, economic, and political lines — all of which have compounded the difficulties of forging pan-Asian identities and institutions. This chapter reviews the role of panethnicity in Asian American civic and political engagement, paying particular attention to the ways in which pan-Asian identities and institutions have been complicated and transformed by the post-1965 immigration.

Coming Together: The Emergence of Pan-Asianism

Asians in the United States have always been active in civic engagement — from striking for higher wages and better working conditions to challenging laws that denied them civil rights to supporting political movements to liberate their homelands (Chan 1991, ch. 5). However, it was not until the late 1960s, with the advent of the Asian American movement, that a pan-Asian consciousness and constituency were first formed. The development of a pan-Asian consciousness and constituency reflected broader societal developments and demographic changes as well as the group's political agenda. Be-

fore World War II, pan-Asian unity was not feasible because the predominantly foreign born Asian population did not share a common language. During the postwar years, owing to immigration restrictions and the growing dominance of the second and even third generations, U.S.-born Asians outnumbered immigrants. By 1960 approximately two-thirds of the Asian populations in California had been born in the United States (Ong 1989, 5-8). With English as the common language, persons from different Asian backgrounds were able to communicate with one another (Ling 1984, 73) and in so doing to create a common identity associated with the United States. Also, the breakdown of economic and residential barriers during the postwar period provided the first opportunity for an unprecedented number of Asian Americans to come into intimate, sustained contact with the larger society — and with one another. Formerly homogeneous, the Asian ethnic enclaves started to house mixed-Asian communities, as well as non-Asian groups. Multigroup suburban centers also emerged. Paul Wong (1972, 34) reported that since the early 1960s Asian Americans of diverse national origins had moved into the suburbs outside the major Asian communities such as Berkeley and San Mateo, California. Although a small proportion of the local population, these Asian Americans tended to congregate in pockets; consequently, in some residential blocks a majority of the residents were Asian Americans.

Although broader social struggles and internal demographic changes provided the impetus for the Asian American movement, it was the Asian Americans' politics — explicitly radical, confrontational, and pan-Asian — that shaped the movement's content. Inspired by anticolonial revolutions in Asia and by black and Chicano revolutionary nationalism, college students of Asian ancestry sought to transcend inter-Asian ethnic divisions and to ally themselves with other "Third World" minorities (Blauner 1972, ch. 2; Omatsu 1994). Through pan-Asian organizations, publications, and Asian American studies programs, Asian American activists forged a pan-Asian consciousness by highlighting their shared resistance to Western imperialism and to U.S. racism. The pan-Asian concept enabled diverse Asian American groups to understand their "unequal circumstances and histories as being related" (Lowe 1991, 30). By the mid-1970s,

"Asian American" had become a familiar term (Lott 1976, 30). Although first coined by college activists, the pan-Asian concept began to be used extensively by professional and community spokespersons to lobby for the welfare, health and business interests of Americans of Asian descent. Pan-Asian media such as *Amerasia Journal*, *Asian Week* newspaper and *AsiAm* magazine have also been established. Moreover, single ethnic organizations such as the Japanese American Citizens League and the Organization of Chinese Americans began to take up issues that affect all Asians. Commenting on the "literally scores of pan-Asian organizations" in the mid-1970s, William Liu (1976, 6) asserted that "the idea of pan-Asian cooperation [was] viable and ripe for development."

The advent of state-sponsored affirmative action programs provided another material reason for Asian American subgroups to consolidate their efforts. Because the welfare state bureaucracy often treats all Asian Americans as a single administrative unit in distributing economic and political resources, it imposes a pan-Asian structure on persons and communities dependent on government support. As dealings with government bureaucracies increased, political and civic participation along a pan-Asian line became necessary, not only because numbers confer power but also because the pan-Asian category is the institutionally relevant category in the political and legal system. Administratively treated as a homogeneous group, Asian Americans found it necessary — and even advantageous — to respond as a group. The pan-Asian strategy has led to some victories. For example, Asian American legislators, community leaders, and organizations united to fight the Census Bureau's proposal to collapse all Asian racial codes into one summary category for the 1980 and 1990 censuses. Partly in response to the strength of their political lobbying, the Census Bureau finally conceded to the coalition's demand for a detailed enumeration of Asian subgroups. At first glance, Asian American demands to be counted separately in the 1980 and 1990 censuses suggest the absence of pan-Asian solidarity. However, this struggle for separate counts was waged by pan-Asian advocacy groups.[i] Without the competitive advantage of these pan-Asian efforts, the struggle with the Census Bureau probably would not have been so successful. Thus, rather than demonstrating the lack of pan-

Asian solidarity, the census struggles illustrate the organizational dialectic of Asian American ethnicity: a demand for separate counts was waged by a pan-Asian coalition. It is noteworthy that Asian Americans who lobbied for individual group data also pushed for an accurate *total* API count. In other words, the census protest was mostly against the *absence* of subgroup categories, not against the *presence* of the pan-Asian category (Espiritu 1992).

While political benefits certainly promote pan-Asian organization, it is anti-Asian violence that has consistently drawn the largest pan-Asian support. For many Asian Americans, anti-Asian violence concerns the entire group, cross-cutting class, cultural, and generational divisions. The 1982 killing of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American who was beaten to death by two white men who allegedly mistook him for Japanese, united Asian Americans across generational, ethnic, class, and political lines. For some Asian Americans, the Chin case marked their first participation in a pan-Asian effort. Their belief that all Asian Americans are potential victims propelled them to join together in self-defense and to monitor, report, and protest anti-Asian violence. In particular, Asian Americans pushed for the collection and reporting of statistics on anti-Asian crimes at the local, state, and federal levels. This pan-Asian activism has forced government officials, the media, and the public to be more attentive and responsive to anti-Asian crimes (Espiritu 1992).

Changing Demographic and Economic Characteristics

The post-1965 immigration surge has transformed Asian America — and thus the feasibility of pan-Asian civic engagement — in dramatic ways. The share of immigration in the United States from Asia as a proportion of total admission grew from 5 percent in the 1950s to 11 percent in the 1960s and to 33 percent in the 1970s, and it has remained at 35 percent since 1980 (Zhou and Gatewood 2000, 9). In sheer numbers, the Asian American population grew from a total of 1.4 million in 1970 to 7.3 million in 1990, to 10.2 million in 2000. By 2030, it is projected that the API population will be nearly 25 million and will comprise just over seven percent of the total population (Ong and Scott, Chapter 1). According to Zhou and Gatewood (2000, 14),

immigration accounted for more than two-thirds of the spectacular population growth. For the new national origins groups (Indians, Koreans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and the Hmong), population growth can be attributed almost entirely to immigration (Zhou and Gatewood 2000, 14). The dramatic growth in the absolute numbers of Asian Americans has been accompanied by increasing ethnic, generational, and socioeconomic diversity within Asian America. As Michael Omi (1993, 205) succinctly states, "The irony is that the term ["Asian American"] came into vogue at precisely the historical moment when new Asian groups were entering the U.S. who would render the term problematic."

Ethnic Diversification

Before the post-1965 immigration surge, the Asian American population was composed mainly of three ethnic groups: Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino. In 1970 Japanese Americans constituted the single largest group (41 percent of the Asian American population), followed by Chinese Americans (30 percent) and Filipino American (24 percent). Members of other national origin groups (mostly Koreans) represented less than 5 percent of the Asian American population total (Zhou and Gatewood 2000, 13). Coming of age in the 1960s, U.S.-born Japanese and Chinese Americans formed the core force of the Asian American movement on the West Coast college campuses and in the Northeast (Espiritu 1992). In contrast, in 2000, the U.S. Census recorded twenty-four national origin groups, and no single group accounted for more than one-quarter of the Asian American population. While Japan has sent very few immigrants to the United States, the Philippines, China and Taiwan, Korea, India, and Vietnam have always been on the list of the top sending countries since 1980 (USINS 1997). Reflecting these immigration patterns, in 2000 the Japanese American share of the Asian American population fell to only 8 percent, and the five largest Asian American groups were Chinese and Taiwanese (24 percent), Filipino (18 percent), Asian Indian (17 percent), Korean (11 percent), and Vietnamese (11 percent) (Barnes and Bennett 2002). The new Asian American demographics have complicated the pan-Asian alignment created in the 1960s and 1970s

among the then largest Asian American groups: Japanese, Chinese, and, to a lesser extent, Filipino Americans.

Generational Diversification

Between the 1940s and 1960s, when immigration from Asia was restricted, U.S.-born Asian Americans dominated the Asian American population. By the 1970s the foreign-born reemerged as a large majority. In 2000, 7.2 million Asian Pacific Americans — approximately 70 percent of the total Asian American population — were foreign born (U.S. Department of Commerce 2002). The foreign-born component dominated all Asian American groups except for Japanese Americans; over 60 percent of Filipinos and nearly 80 percent of Vietnamese and other Asians were foreign born (Zhou and Gatewood 2000, 14). Because of legal exclusion in the past, it is only among the two oldest immigrant groups — the Japanese and Chinese Americans — that a sizable third or fourth generation exists. Among Asian American children under eighteen years of age, more than 90 percent are either foreign-born or children of foreign-born parents (Zhou and Gatewood 2000, 23). Ong and Scott, in Chapter 1 have projected that the foreign born segment will still be a majority in the year 2030.

Class Diversification

Post-1965 immigration has also increased the economic diversity of Asian Americans. In contrast to the largely unskilled immigrant population of the pre-World War II period, the new arrivals include not only low-wage service-sector workers but also significant numbers of white-collar professionals. Ong and Patraporn (2006) report that ethnic differences play a significant role in the unequal distribution of wealth among Asian Americans. Using indirect measures of wealth (mean income, interest, and dividends, rental income and home value), they found that in 2000, Japanese, Chinese and Asian Indians consistently held more wealth at the top end while non-Vietnamese Southeast Asians settled at the bottom end. The most significant gap is between Japanese and non-Vietnamese Southeast Asians where the latter's mean household income is about half that

for Japanese at $47,153 and $88,122 respectively, and their amount of wealth was less than a quarter of that held by Japanese. While Filipinos and Vietnamese fare better in terms of mean income, their interest, dividends and rental income is substantially lower than the average for all Asian Americans. Koreans are slightly below the average of all Asians for all three measures of wealth.

Asian American Identities, Political Attitudes and Policy Concerns

The results from the 2000 Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS)—the nation's first multicity, multiethnic, and multilingual survey of the political attitudes and behavior of Asian Americans on a national scale — support a possible future for a growing pan-Asian consciousness.[ii] Although PNAAPS data indicate that most Asian Americans prefer ethnic- rather than panethnic-based identities, they nevertheless show evidence of panethnic solidarity, especially in policy concerns affecting the Asian American community. Among all respondents, 34 percent identify as ethnic American and 30 percent by ethnic origin alone. Only 15 percent identify as "Asian American." However, among those who do not identify themselves as Asian American, when probed if they have *ever* thought of themselves as Asian American, about half of the respondents report such panethnic identification. Thus, cumulatively, close to six out of ten respondents identify with the panethnic "Asian American" label in some contexts. And about half of the respondents believe that what happened generally to other Asian American groups would impact what happened in their life (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004, 17).

The potential for Asian American unity is also evident in their similar voting behavior and political attitudes. The PNAAPS data show that 70 percent who report an opinion on affirmative action are in favor of it; 73 percent favor bilingual services and public information; and respondents, by more than a two-to-one margin, approve rather than disapprove of political contributions by legal immigrants (Lien et al. 2004, 18). Not surprisingly, the majority also favor the election of Asian American candidates and public policies addressing

the concerns and needs of the Asian American and immigrant communities (Lien et al. 2004, 18).

Like previous studies, the PNAAPS data show that those who experience discrimination are more likely to develop panethnic consciousness. Approximately half of the study's respondents identify a racial or ethnic issue (i.e., race relations, language barriers, discrimination, stereotyping, lack of ethnic political power, and interethnic relations) as one of the "most important problems" facing the Asian American communities (Lien et al. 2004, 224). However, panethnic identity construction is not necessarily uniform across groups. As an example, the PNAAPS data suggest that the experience of racial discrimination may mobilize panethnic identification among the U.S.-born but not among those born in Asia. Rather than becoming politicized and mobilized, immigrants who experience racial discrimination appear to "feel alienated or petrified in the host society" (Lien et al. 2004, 67-68). These findings underline the importance of recognizing that the processes of racial formation and civic engagement may be very different for the U.S.-born compared to immigrants.

Organizing as Asian Americans

During the post-1965 period, the Asian American community's growing numbers, high growth rate, and local concentration promise to enhance the political influence of their pan-Asian civic engagement. On the other hand, the expanding diversity of Asian America presents multiple challenges to building a meaningful pan-Asian political coalition. A review of the research on Asian American civic engagement suggests that pan-Asian organizing is a *secondary but politically critical phenomenon* that is constantly shaped and reshaped by social, cultural, legal, and political forces in the environment. It is also important to note that ethnic-specific identities and panethnic identities are not mutually exclusive; both exist simultaneously and both serve as a resource for the development of Asian American political participation and empowerment (Lien et al. 2004, 209-210).

Cumulatively, existing data suggest that pan-Asianism is closely linked to civic engagement: Asian Americans, regardless of how they

define themselves ethnically, organize panethnically when they determine that pan-Asian alliance is important for the protection and advancement of their civic and political agenda. In her analysis of 55 national pan-Asian organizations from 1970 to 1998, Dina Okamoto (2006) found that the number of pan-Asian organizations has increased since 1970 and throughout the 1980s, with the peak occurring in 1980. A smaller number of national pan-Asian organizations formed in the 1990s, which may be due to the increasing diversity of the Asian populations or to the increasing size and influence of the existing organizations. More than one-quarter of the pan-Asian organizations established between 1970 and 1998 were political organizations that shared the common goals of promoting civil, economic and political rights for Asian Americans as well as for Asians in their respective countries of origin. Some examples include The Asian American Voters Coalition that promotes the equal treatment of Asian Americans in the U.S. political system and The Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence that fights racism and violence against Asian Americans. Another one-quarter of the pan-Asian organizations were professional organizations that promote networking, information sharing, and equal employment opportunities for all Asian Americans. Okamoto (2006) reports that these organizations shared more than their professional interests. For example, the mission of the Asian American Journalists Association is not simply to increase employment of API journalists, but also to monitor stereotypes in the media and to advocate for fair and accurate news coverage of API issues. In a recent study of 2004 registered Asian American organizations, Chi-kan Richard Hung (2005) found that pan-Asian organizations are in the minority (14 percent), but that they tend to have more assets and revenue than ethnic-specific ones. Echoing Okamoto's findings, Hung reports that social service and public interest organizations are more likely to be pan-Asian than religious and cultural ones. Moreover, even though pan-Asian organizations are not growing as quickly as ethnic-specific ones, their steady growth, especially in the arena of political advocacy, is noteworthy. Lai (2007-08, 7) reports that Asian American community-based organizations are among the "fastest growing public service sectors in California during the last three decades." In 1998, over 250 pan-Asian

organizations existed in Los Angeles and Orange counties. In 2007, there were over 150 organizations that focused on political advocacy alone. Overall, these findings suggest that Asian Americans form pan-Asian organizations to respond to external political and funding opportunities and to fight unequal opportunities and discriminatory treatment.

Other studies confirm that racial discrimination galvanizes pan-Asian mobilization: as Asian Americans find themselves without opportunities and fair treatment, they establish supportive alliances from which to strategize about collective issues (Okamoto 2006). As an example, Leland Saito (1998) reports that Japanese and Chinese Americans came together in Monterey Park, California to protest xenophobic attempts to remove Asian languages on business signs. Linda Vo's (2004) study of the Asian Business Association in San Diego provides another example: Asian Americans joined the association because of shared professional interests and shared experiences of economic exclusion and employment discrimination. Along the same line, Okamoto (2006) found that underlying structural conditions, such as occupational segregation and spatial concentration, heighten panethnic consciousness, leading Asian Americans to found pan-Asian institutions. These pan-Asian organizations are important because they provide a setting for persons of diverse Asian backgrounds to establish social ties and to discuss their common problems and experiences. As Asian Americans come together to coordinate, plan, and participate in the activities of these organizations, they become tied together in a cohesive interpersonal network (Espiritu 1992).

Asian American activists have also organized to combat anti-Asian violence, defined not as random attacks against Asians but as a product of structural oppression and everyday encounters (Kurashige 2000, 15). The activities of the Asian Americans United, a panethnic community-based organization in Philadelphia, provide an example (Kurashige 2000). When large numbers of Southeast Asian immigrants began experiencing problems in Philadelphia with racist violence, educational inequality, and poor housing, a small group of educated East and South Asian American activists responded. Modeling themselves after the militant Yellow Seeds or-

ganization in the 1970s, group members insisted on anti-imperialist politics, a critique of racism as institutional and structural, and a focus on activist organizing and politics. They organized a successful rent strike and were part of a victorious legal campaign to institute bilingual education in the local schools. Most important, they sought to build relationships with working-class Southeast Asian communities by creating a youth leadership-training program organized around a pan-Asian identity and radical politics. When a violent attack on Southeast Asian youths in that city by a group of white youths led to a fight that left one of the white attackers dead, city police and prosecutors portrayed the attackers as victims and laid the responsibility for the violence at the hands of the Southeast Asians. Although unable to secure full justice in the court cases that ensued, Asian Americans United seized on the incident as a means of educating its constituency about institutionalized racism. The group succeeded in mobilizing parts of the Asian American community around these efforts, and its success enabled it to move from panethnic to interethnic affiliation through an alliance with a Puerto Rican youth group also plagued by hate crimes, police brutality, and prosecutorial racism (Espiritu et al. 2000, 132). This example suggests that class need not be a source of cleavage among Asian Americans, and that the concerns of working-class Asian Americans *can* unite people at the grassroots level with class-conscious members of the intellectual and professional strata (Kurashige 2000).

The pervasiveness of racism also catalyzes pan-Asian organizing among Asian American college students. Colleges constitute an important site for the emergence of pan-Asianism because they are among the public institutions that lump all Asians into a single group and also because young Asian Americans — whose ethnic and racial identities are shaped largely in dialogue with and in opposition to U.S. racist ideologies and practices — are much more receptive to Asian American panethnicity than their immigrant parents. In a study of an Asian American student organization, APASO, at a large research university in the Midwest, Rhoads et al. (2002) reports that ongoing discrimination against Asian Americans reinforces the ongoing need for Asian American students to organize around their pan-Asian identity. This sense of shared experience motivated

APASO to challenge campus structures that may limit the experiences and opportunities of Asian Americans. For example, during the 1999-2000 academic year, APASO pushed for the creation of a multicultural student center and fought to retain seats on a student government association reserved for multicultural student groups. Rhoads et al. (2002) argue that in the process of organizing around their shared experiences with racism, Asian American college students advance collective understandings of their location in the broader society and the political issues that they face collectively as Asian Americans. And it is through organizing and socializing together that their social identity as Asian Americans is reinforced and strengthened (Rhoads et al. 2002, 13). The authors conclude that panethnic organizations play a critical role in reducing campus racism and discrimination because they promote the creation of multicultural academic communities (Rhoads et al. 2002, 14).

Asian Americans have also been active in the policymaking arena. As an immigrant-majority population, Asian Americans have united to contest anti-immigration policies in the late twentieth century. In 1989, a coalition of Asian American legal organizations — the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Asian Law Alliance, the Asian Law Caucus, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California, Na Loio No Na Kanaka — Lawyers for the People of Hawaii, and Nihomachi Legal Outreach — opposed a Senate bill's proposed cap on family-based immigration and the deletion of the second and fifth preference categories[iii] (S 358). The coalition argued that these measures would scale back opportunities for Asian immigrants to reunite with families at a time when the impact of anti-Asian exclusion laws, which were finally lifted in 1965, was still being felt (Wong 2006a, 102-103). During the 1996 presidential election, the issue of immigration was once again at the center of attention for Asian Americans (Leong 2002, 230). In the congressional fight over the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, Asian American (and Latino) groups led the pro-immigrant family coalition, which formed to preserve yearly allocations of family-unification visas. They also lobbied to protect and enhance the rights of foreign workers (Wong 2006a, 163).

Regarding welfare reform, Asian Americans' responses splin-

tered along ethnic and class lines. Many affluent Asian Americans regarded the harsh 1995 Welfare Reform Act, which bars disadvantaged immigrants from many government assistance programs, as a "refugee" or "elderly" immigrant issue that did not concern them (Leong 2002, 231). However, many Asian Americans became interested in the 1995 Act once they realized that it included language that would have made legal immigrants ineligible for student loans and grants. In other words, it was the proposed cut to educational benefits rather than to welfare benefits that galvanized Asian Americans into action because many did not view educational assistance as welfare (Leong 2002, 234-238). The welfare reform case thus encapsulates both the possibilities and limits of pan-Asian advocacy efforts: on the one hand, Asian Americans will organize panethnically to protect their interests; on the other hand, what they perceive to be *their* interests can and do exclude the needs of the most marginalized Asian American groups.

Challenges to Pan-Asianism

The growing population of bi- and multiracial Asian Americans poses an immediate challenge to pan-Asianism. However, some existing evidence suggests that the growth of the population of multiracial Asians need not spell the end of pan-Asianism. According to the 2000 U.S. census, approximately 850,000 people reported that they were Asian and white, and 360,000 reported that they were two or more Asian groups (Barnes and Bennett 2002, table 4). While there exists no comprehensive data on the racial identification of multiracial Asians, the close contact with Asian American advocacy groups maintained by the Hapa Issues Forum (HIF) — a national multiracial Asian American organization — suggests that multiracial Asian and pan-Asian identities need not be mutually exclusive. From its inception, HIF has pursued a double political mission: pushing for recognition of multiracial Asians as well as for the civil rights agendas of existing Asian American groups. These two goals are most evident in the group's response to the controversy over the classification of multiracials in the 2000 census. Denouncing the government's past attempts to wedge mixed-race Americans into one rigid racial cate-

gory, most mainstream multiracial groups favored adding a "multiracial" category to the 2000 census. However, most civil rights groups, including many pan-Asian groups, argued that such a category would dilute the numbers of people who identify with a particular race and cause their respective communities to lose hard-won gains in civil rights, education, and electoral arenas. Refusing this "splitting" of their multiple personal and political identities, HIF's board of directors rejected the "stand-alone multiracial" category and endorsed the "check more than one" format, contending that the latter option would allow them to identify as multiracial *and* "still be counted with their Asian American brothers and sisters" (King 2000, 203). In other words, the "check more than one" format would allow the data to be collected in a way that recognized the existence of multiracial Asians and still make it possible to use the data in "the five racial category format to track discrimination against Asian Americans" (King 2000, 202). Although data are limited on the relationship between the identity of multiracial Asian Americans and their civic engagement, the HIF's decision to endorse the "check more than one" format keeps open the possibility that multiracials will fashion their politics along multiple lines of affiliation, including panethnically.

As discussed above, another challenge to pan-Asianism is that it can mask salient divisions, subsume nondominant groups, and create marginalities — all of which threaten the legitimacy and effectiveness of pan-Asian organizing. Existing evidence indicates that pan-Asian organizations often reproduce national and ethnic hierarchies as class and organizational hierarchies. For example, some Asian American groups, such as Filipinos and Southeast Asians and South Asians, have accused the more established Chinese and Japanese Americans of monopolizing the funding and jobs meant for all Asian Americans; the dissidents complained that newer and more impoverished groups were simply used as window display (Espiritu 1992). In an ethnographic study of an Asian panethnic community agency in northern California, Eileen Otis (2001) reports that national hierarchies were reproduced in the distribution of staff positions in the agency, with individuals from more economically developed countries — often countries that were more closely tied to the United States — obtaining the coveted staff positions. With the exception of

one staff member who came to the United States from Vietnam as a child, all of the staff members were from Asian "Tigers" or "developed" East Asian countries. Otis (2001, 362) concludes that "it was no accident that those from countries with the strongest neocolonial ties to the U.S. obtained these positions, since individuals from countries like Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand tend to have more opportunities to develop English language skills." Comparing the experiences of affluent Chinese immigrants and poor Cambodian refugees, Aihwa Ong (1996. 751) concludes that the category "Asian American" "must confront the contradictions and instabilities within the imposed solidarity, brought about by the group's internal class, ethnic, and racial stratifications." In Asian American studies, many scholars have critically pointed to the field's privileging of East Asians over South and Southeast Asians — a clear indictment of the suppression and diverse histories, epistemologies, and voices within the pan-Asian framework. For example, in an edited volume on South Asians in Asian America aptly titled *A Part, Yet Apart*, Rajiv Shankar (1998, x) laments that South Asians "find themselves so unnoticed as an entity that they feel as if they are merely a crypto-group, often included but easily marginalized within the house of Asian America."

Discussion

The emergence of the pan-Asian entity in the late 1960s may be one of the most significant political developments in Asian American civic engagement. The existing evidence suggests that Asian American panethnic organizing is closely linked to civic engagement: whenever there is a need to combine their resources, Asian Americans act as a cohesive unit, presenting a united front against the dominant society. This united front does not mean that Asian Americans dismiss internal differences and divisions, but only that they look beyond them.

The post-1965 immigration has fueled population growth and led to greater visibility for Asian Americans, but their changing demographics has also complicated their civic engagement. In particular, Asian immigration to the U.S. is bifurcated along class line:

many Asian immigrants are uneducated, unskilled and poor, while others are highly educated, skilled, and affluent. Moreover, Asian immigrants do not share a common history, sensibility, or political outlook with U.S.-born Asians. As reviewed in this paper, such internal diversities have made it more difficult for Asian Americans to speak with a unified political voice. Thus Asian American panethnicity has been an efficacious but contested category, encompassing not only cultural differences but also social, political, and economic inequalities.

As we end the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Asian American community is at a crossroads: how to build pan-Asian solidarity amid increasing internal diversities and amid an increasingly polarized U.S. society? In 2030, it is projected that the Asian American population will continue to be diverse along generational and ethnic lines. Given past patterns of Asian American organizing, I expect that ethnic-specific organizations will continue to outnumber pan-Asian ones. On the other hand, even though pan-Asian organizations will be in the minority, I anticipate that they will continue to maintain their influence among Asian Americans and within the larger society. This is because pan-Asian organizations tend to have more assets, revenues, and politically experienced leaders than ethnic-specific organizations. Moreover, because pan-Asianism is primarily a political identity, it does not appear to conflict with ethnic-specific identities. In other words, while those with a pan-Asian American identity are more likely to be engaged outside their ethnic group, those with an ethnic-specific identity do not appear to limit their engagement to within-group arenas. Finally, once established, pan-Asian organizations further promote civic engagement because they become the institutional symbol of Asian American unity and the political voice of Asian American interests. As the de facto representatives of Asian American concerns, these organizations influence a much wider Asian American audience than their membership rosters suggest. Pan-Asian institutions are also important because their very existence can spawn similar organizations. Once institutionalized, the pan-Asian structure reinforces the cohesiveness of already existing networks and expands these networks (Espiritu 1992).

Perhaps most importantly, past research indicates that racial discrimination is a key catalyst for pan-Asian mobilization. Today, Asians in the United States continue to face a host of challenges that affect all Asians: hate violence, racial profiling, anti-Asian media treatment, the 'model minority' myth, the 'perpetual foreigner' stereotype, exclusionary immigration and naturalization policies, citizens-only restrictions, and denials of language rights — all of which require them to organize panethnically (Ancheta, Ma, and Nakanishi 2004, v). In the next two decades, as the United States competes internationally with China and India's growing economic influence, it is likely that domestic anti-Asianism will correspondingly rise, making pan-Asian efforts — both from pan-Asian advocacy groups and from the combined efforts of single-ethnic advocacy groups — a political necessity. But much work remains to be done. The challenge for Asian American leaders will be to identify and articulate shared interests and ideology within the socially and economically diverse Asian American community that can serve as the basis for pan-Asian identification and mobilization. Some key mobilizing issues include immigration, language access, racial profiling (especially for South Asian Americans in the post 9/11 era), and anti-Asian violence. Perhaps more importantly, pan-Asianism will not materialize unless and until Asian Americans double their effort to solicit new membership and groom fresh leadership, especially from within the ranks of the less affluent underrepresented Southeast Asian communities.

Notes

[i] The groups included: the National Coalition for an Accurate Count of Asian Pacific Americans, the Asian Pacific American Census Advisory Committee, and the Pacific/Asian Coalition, with the combined efforts of single-ethnic advocacy groups such as the Japanese American Citizens League, the Chinese for Affirmative Action, and the Organization of Chinese Americans.

[ii] The PNAAPS utilizes two linked fate questions that are also found in surveys on African-American political participation: 1) "Do you think what happens generally to other groups of Asians in this country will affect what happens in your life?" and 2) If yes "Will it affect it a lot, some or not very much?"

[iii] unmarried children of citizens and residents, and adult siblings of citizens and residents